

A trip down Light Shock Lane. Part 5 - life after Light Shock

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Post-Amiga

As the once-lucrative Amiga market began to fade, Light Shock switched their focus to flourishing current platforms such as the PC, Sony PlayStation and SEGA Saturn. Even the 3DO designed by Dave Needle and R.J. Mical was a consideration, though being discontinued towards the end of 1996 due to poor sales (2m units), that was never to be.

Resilient as ever, they devised 'Pray for Death', a DOS-based Killer Instinct style fighting game published by Virgin Interactive. Lamentably it proved to be their swan song; owing to financial difficulties Light Shock struggled to stay afloat in this largely self-funded arena and were forced to bow out prematurely.

"After publishing "Pray for Death" with Virgin, we sought to move on to 3D games, especially targeting the then-new Playstation console. For a brief period of time we

experimented with the development kit on a couple of concept games, specifically a rally racing game and a first-person shooter, but after failing to secure funding to continue development of these two demos, we had to close Light Shock software."

Francesco Iorio

Before being acquired by Take-Two Interactive in 2001, and subsequently absorbed into Rockstar Games as their Vienna division two years later, Neo developed the Amiga/PC titles The Clue!, and Whale's Voyage I & II, as well as Rent-a-Hero, Alien Nations and The Sting! solely for the PC. Of these, only Whale's Voyage II was self-published.

In the meantime, Neo published the Amiga titles Cedric and the Lost Sceptre for Alcatraz, and Spherical Worlds on behalf of 4Matted.

As we know, two of the four alluring titles Light Shock were working on back in 1995 as previewed in various Amiga magazines failed to make the leap from the drawing board into Amiga's action-starved disk drives.



Post-Light Shock

I read in a Google translation of an Italian article covering the nation's history with fighting games that following Light Shock's demise, the team 'melted'.

Having talked to some of them personally and remotely stalked others, I'm delighted to report that the way this transpired was nothing at all like Jack Nicholson's Joker scene from the Batman movie.



They are all alive and kicking, and to this day impelling those typically insubordinate computers to dance like impeccably trained monkeys.

Did Francesco and the rest of the Light Shock team move onto other platforms when the Amiga market collapsed, or leave the industry entirely though? That's what we're about to find out. Are we sitting comfortably?

"We eventually moved on the PC and we attempted a move towards the nascent fifth generation of games consoles, unfortunately after a year and a half we had to close due to lack of funding. The game concepts being worked on were relatively solid, but the industry relied completely on self-funding a demo and then selling the game to publishers who would help to front part of the development costs, and that proved to be impossible for us."

Francesco Iorio

According to the LinkedIn profile of Francesco's co-founder, Light Shock became 'Digital Creation' in 1998 and were associated with the development of Grand Prix Online and Adidas Street Soccer. How did that transpire and were these games ever released?

"One of the founders (Marco) went on to work with some friends of his who had a small software and services company (Digital Creations), and via that channel he and Massimiliano released GP online and Adidas Street Soccer, both for PC."



Adidas Street Soccer was a project that Light Shock started, and was written by an ex-colleague of Massimiliano's at Simulmondo. We found the Adidas sponsorship and the game was released after Light Shock closed as a mini-game included with some indoor soccer shoes. I am not sure any online material exists about it.

The same game engine was subsequently reused to publish (in Italy only) a similar game "Indoor Soccer" by Prograph, the company I founded with Davide D'Aversa, which Massimiliano joined after some time. I don't think anything exists online about this game either.



GP online was the outcome of a small project Matteo, Massimiliano, Marco and myself developed as a hobby after hours and it was originally named "WIN", an acronym for Work In Night (please note the bad English). The game was a top-down Formula 1 game, inspired by Capcom's F1 Dream, and originally designed to run on DOS PC to be playable by up to 32 people at once on a LAN. It was then ported to Windows, with online multiplayer communication via modem, and had a small commercial release.



The original game engine was then reused by Prograph to release (also in Italy only) "GP Sprint", with all multiplayer features removed. This release was also too small to find any trace of it online..."

Francesco Iorio

Leaving Light Shock, Massimiliano's career in the games industry steamed ahead at full tilt. He worked for Virgin as a senior game designer/producer, market analyst and game designer for Sony Liverpool (previously Psygnosis of course) and SEGA, a jack of all creative video game trades for several lesser-known companies, as well as taking leading roles in two he founded himself.

For the past 13 years he has worked as the product manager, lead game designer, graphic artist and QA manager for Artematica, a mobile, web, PC and console games developer based in Liguria.

Francesco also forged onwards in the IT industry, taking on a variety of roles (including a stint with IBM) as a software engineer/developer/architect before becoming Revolution Software's technical director where he also served as head of development for the Circle of Blood and Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon projects.

Five years prior, Francesco operated in the same role working on Tony Tough and the Night of Roasted Moths for his own company, Prograph Research.

Leaving gaming behind, he joined Autodesk in 2009 as a senior principal research scientist, and within the space of seven years rose to the lofty heights of director of computational science research, based in their Toronto office.

Correspondingly, the career of Black Viper programmer, Emanuele Viola, continued to blossom, though not in a direction we may have predicted...

"Towards the end of Black Viper, and after it, I also worked with other people on a 3D engine. We used things like binary-space-partition trees, and had a demo working both on PC and Amiga. But then it quickly became clear that the only way to even hope to produce anything competitive would be to work on the project full time, which was also difficult because we worked on different parts of Rome and there was no internet. It had been much more convenient to share floppy disks in class with Marco Genovesi!

At some point I also got an offer from Lightshock software to move to their Belluno headquarters to work full time on programming games. They promised a hefty salary and considerable freedom. I thought about it, but in the end I did not go for it. I was in the middle of my college studies which were going well and I didn't feel like abandoning them (my parents also advised me against). Again I remember the phone call during which I turned them down, perhaps another mistake. I had always wondered what had happened to Lightshock software!



Afterwards I was in touch with other wanna-be software houses, but it was clear that they did not have the capacity that Lightshock software had, and I think they did not end up producing any game.

So I completed my studies, I got interested in mathematics and theoretical computer science, and ended up doing a Ph.D. at Harvard University, and have stayed in the US ever since. I still program, and occasionally I toy with the idea of being involved again with a computer game (besides as a player of course, that has never stopped)."

Pray for Death co-designer and story writer, Carlo Gioventu, also went down the academic route...

"I teach computer graphics 3D since 1999 at Accademia di Belle Arti di Macerata, where I've graduated in '97, and since 2003 I teach Computer Games at Accademia di Brera in Milan.



I founded the no-profit cultural association MenteZero in 2004 for teaching free computer graphics and R&D to people."

Alberto Gelpi - Black Viper's cinematics artist - went on to create the introduction sequence for Nebula Fighter on behalf of Holodream Software before leaving the games industry to become a 3D graphic designer and film editor.

Still based in Rome, he now directs commercials, documentaries and corporate videos for a living.



Pray for Death co-designer and story writer, Sebastiano Del Gobbo, built upon his existing skills whilst also exploring alternative artistic avenues...

"I started working as a freelance software developer and I still do it today. But my passion for art has changed during the years: I'm not still using 3D rendering software. Now I'm a professional photographer too."

Marco Biondi, a key contributor to all of Light Shock's wares, didn't waste any time carving out a new career path for himself...

"Fightin' Spirit results and Virgin decline destroyed the internal relationships in an unrecoverable way, passion backfired mainly in anger and sadly was out of control. I founded another startup after Light Shock. 96 was the boom of Internet in Italy and we had some interesting opportunities, nobody wanted to restart making games for a while. Being a software/internet company gave us also the possibility to design some small games (mainly marketing oriented) and it was fun even if was a marginal activity.

In 2006 I stopped to be an entrepreneur and started a career as employee in a big tech company that now (after a couple of acquisitions) is Docomo Digital where I'm a "software architect" and I lead a development group. I still have a big passion for videogames and some nostalgia of the times when 4 guys in a garage can produce something amazing!"

USA Racing coder and Fightin' Spirit supporting coder, Cesare di Mauro, went on to find employment with various organisations as a software engineer. Amongst his many hi-tech development projects he devised a kiosk jukebox written entirely in Motorola 68000 assembly language and based on the Amiga 600 hardware. Operated via a full-fledged GUI it's capable of controlling three laser video players and six CD players.

For three years he taught computer science and ECDL courses, before becoming a columnist for the 'Hardware Upgrade' online magazine, for which the computer architecture expert contributes to their 'coder thoughts' section.

In his spare time, Cesare was engaged with the TiNA (Tecnologia iNformatica Amica) FPGA clone venture, intended to recreate a supercharged Amiga 500 or 1200. Sadly the initiative was dropped due to the competing demands of a new job. The Vampire accelerators have since emerged to plug that gap in the market.

Today he's based at Intel in Germany working as a senior software and QA engineer where he eats, sleeps and breathes debugging. Testing times for sure!

Black Viper musician, Nicola Tomljanovich, was working for Light Shock as a freelancer so didn't technically *leave* the company when they folded. He continued in this capacity operating as a sound designer/composer, as well as a kickboxing/boxing instructor and research development engineer focusing on GPS solutions.

In 1994 he started his own business - AMC Interactive - to supply the audio for multimedia projects such as video games, short animated films and TV commercials. Alongside this going concern, Nicola works in the military defence industry as a project manager and team technical lead for NEXT Ingegneria dei Sistemi Spa. Based in Rome, he is responsible for the design and development of Man Machine Interface software in relation to military C2 systems.

Fightin' Spirit graphician, Giacinto Platania, continued working in Paterno as an illustrator and video game artist specialising in 3D graphics. He's been employed by Ds Effects since 2000.

As explained in much more depth in the Black Viper chapter, graphician, Marco Genovesi went on to become Dreamlike Vision's art director and CG artist. That is, in between designing the introduction sequence for Nebula Fighter on behalf of Holodream Software, released in 2003.



Subsequently he occupied the role of lead digital matte painter for Framestore and the Moving Picture Company,

where he is now the head of 3D digital matte painting.



Top, left to right: Cesare di Mauro, Francesco Iorio, Marco Biondi

Bottom, left to right: Massimiliano Calamai, Nicola Tomljanovich, Sebastiano Del Gobbo

As an outsider from Manchester, England, who better to encapsulate the impassioned, touching journey of an inspirational Italian development team who operated across the Atlantic Ocean almost a 1000 miles away, two decades ago? Heh, there is that. How can I even begin to contemplate

neatly wrapping up the collective half-lives of such a diverse group of talented people? It feels insulting to even try.

What I *can* attest to is how much I've relished vicariously retracing this poignant bread crumb trail of discovery with them, through the highs and lows, regrets, jubilation, hopes and dreams, and beyond. I'm certain I won't be alone...

Stephen King would know how to bow out gracefully.

"The most important things are the hardest things to say. They are the things you get ashamed of, because words diminish them - words shrink things that seemed limitless when they were in your head to no more than living size when they're brought out."

....or perhaps not.

Blatant cop-out aside, finally I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to the former Light Shock team for so generously contributing to this engrossing - and largely untold - retrospective. Without their critical input, this article wouldn't have left the starting blocks.